

War and Protest on Music and Teens in Southern Illinois

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The riots and rock 'n' roll of the 1970s had a strong impact on teens. This clearly as can be demonstrated by looking at the campus of Southern Illinois University (SIU). Student riots broke out and were fueled by a number of issues including war, rebellion, and government control. Protest music, or rock 'n roll, seemed to encourage disrespect of authority. In southern Illinois the source of music centered on WIDB radio, which reported the unrest at SIU, war news, and the popular hits of 1970s.

On May 1, 1970, President Nixon announced that the United States was escalating the war by attacking Cambodia. This did not make many of the citizens of the United States happy. In fact SIU students had been protesting ROTC programs and the Vietnamese Studies Center since January. The presence of these military advocates on campus enraged many students. Another sore spot was the Student Governments' annual elections. These elections determined the direction of power the student body took for the year. Favored by most students were the "radical" candidates or those that supported changes in institutions and/or the government and legal systems. Unfortunately it seems in the election of 1970 the voice the students held through "radicals" was extinguished with the election of a very non-radical student body president. Therefore the objections the student body had were stifled emotions were pent up.

Pent up emotions can lead to rebellion. Three days after Nixon's announcement, Kent State University in Ohio gathered a large crowd to protest the war. While students were peacefully gathering for protest, the National Guard stood watch. The troops had

been ordered to oversee the protest and had been given live ammunition. Students were asked to leave, and after failing to disburse, the troops opened fire. Four students were killed, many were seriously injured by random gunfire and dozens were injured from the stampede in the struggle to escape. News of the incident in Ohio traveled quickly over the country. The peaceful protest that went wrong upset thousands. The Kent State incident galvanized student protests around the nation and SIU was eager to join in the protest. On Monday, May 4, 1970, the Student Senate at SIU voted unanimously to join the national strike against war. They scheduled a class boycott for two days later.

On Wednesday, a protest or boycott was held at noon in front of Morris Library, with 3,000 students attending. An account of the event was broadcast on WIDB radio station describing the students as "seeking to extend official class suspension, the crowd moves to Lawson, and Wham, disrupting classes, pulling fire alarms, trying to get students out of class to join the crowd." Just as at Kent State, the National Guard was called into action at SIU. Van Anderson, a student at SIU, described the crowd action in an interview in the *Daily Egyptian*. "What I saw outside is an image I will never forget: broken shop windows stretching for three blocks down South Illinois Avenue, a trail of shattered glass in the wake of rioters fueled by anger, drugs, and booze." The following day troops attacked students with tear gas. On Friday, two days after the initial riot Martial Law was declared for SIU. The conditions under Martial Law banned the assembly of any groups and prohibited anyone from being outside between the hours of 7:30 p.m. and 6:00 a.m.

WIDB played an important role in escalating the student unrest. WIDB's original concept was that students wanted music, entertainment, and some information. Some information transformed the station into the news authority on riots for SIU students. In addition it played all the hits for teens and young people of the time. Songs like Buffalo Springfield's "For What It's Worth" included lyrics such as "A thousand people in the street singing songs and carrying signs. Mostly say hooray for our side. It's time to stop, hey, what's that sound everybody look what's going down". Another song inspired by the events of the 1970s and the war protests is Edwin Starr's "War", which asked what good is it anyway?

During the 1970s rock 'n' roll, songs were inspired and embraced a rebellious group. Geoffrey Ritter wrote in the *Daily Egyptian*, "between 1968 and 1978 movies got bigger, social boundaries got smaller, and rock 'n' roll emerged as one of the definitive American art forms". Those songs are still played today and demonstrate what happens when a student body's voice is stifled. The pent up emotion against war in 1970 inspired music and new public protests. Hopefully, in the future, disagreements between a governing body and the governed will be solved with less violence and more music. However, in the 1970s the music encouraged teens to speak their minds and act on those thoughts. [From Buffalo Springfield, "For What Its Worth" at www.lyricz.net/B/ Buffalo+Springfield/89747/ (Nov. 1, 2004); Geoffrey Ritter, "The 70s in the Long Run" at "<http://www.Dailyegyptian.com/summer/01/07/01/1970s.html> (Oct. 19, 2004); Starr, Edwin, "War", [http:// www.getlyrical.com/lyrics.html?type=Song&Id=ov.1](http://www.getlyrical.com/lyrics.html?type=Song&Id=ov.1), 2004);

WIDB Network.org, “History Chapter” <http://www.widbnetwork.org/history22.htm>

[widbnetwork.org History23. htm](http://www.widbnetwork.org/history23.htm); <http://www.widbnetwork.org/history24.htm>.

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